

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Put railway talks on the fast track!

German-Russian talks in Moscow addressed joint projects in railway technology, but the timetable is too slow.

A German delegation of industrialists and railway experts visited Moscow on Oct. 25-28, led by Berlin Mayor Eberhard Diepgen. The talks didn't entirely proceed according to schedule, due to the crisis in the government of Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who was facing a no-confidence vote in parliament. But the visit did yield agreements of a limited scope, and served to underline the importance of a vital project that has been languishing for five years, while unemployment devastates both Russia and Germany.

As *EIR* pointed out last week in an analysis of the Oct. 16 German elections (p. 44), Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in a spectacular 10-point address on Nov. 28, 1989, had spoken of the need for a joint project between East and West to restore that Paris-Berlin-Moscow rail connection. This was less than three weeks after the Berlin Wall came down.

Kohl reiterated the theme over the weeks and months after that parliamentary address, and also the Russian side sent out signals that it was considering the project, during the April-May 1990 period.

Then-Deputy Soviet Transportation Minister Vitali Budko maintained communication with East German Minister of Public Transportation Horst Gibtner about the option of launching a "truly revolutionary" project that would involve substantial western financial commitment and a Soviet offer to build a new rail line for high-speed trains from Berlin, via Warsaw and Minsk, to Moscow. For the first time in 130 years of Russian railway history, this would have the standard, western European gauge,

and thus allow a direct linkup with the West's transportation grid. No longer would it be necessary to change trains at Brest-Litovsk, on the Poland-Belarus border. Trains would be able to make the long trip from Berlin to Moscow—almost 2,000 kilometers—in 12-15 hours, instead of 30-48 hours.

The Budko proposal was put on the agenda of various western expert panels on East-West transportation, and of the European Commission, but a decision on it was postponed for reasons of free-market ideology, lack of interest in a big state role in such projects, and fiscal austerity on the part of western governments.

It was not until March 1994 that serious discussion resumed, at the All-European Conference on Transportation in Crete, and discussion continued at the summit meeting of the European Union in Corfu in June. The Crete conference resolved that priority be given to the extension of the western transport infrastructure to the East, and the Corfu summit approved the idea "in principle," passing the mandate for a more detailed discussion to the EU summit that is scheduled to take place in Essen, Germany on Dec. 11-12.

Now, here is where the October visit of the German delegation to Moscow comes into the picture. Representatives of German railway producers like Deutsche Waggonbau (DWA), and of the Berlin Institute of Railway Technology, had a number of projects for Russo-German cooperation on their agenda.

Discussion partners on the Russian side included Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Transportation Minister Genadi Fadeyev, members of the Moscow

Grand Academy of Transportation, and officials of the Russian State Railways and the Moscow Metroline.

Unfortunately, the scheduled meeting between Fadeyev and Diepgen was cancelled, because an encounter with Chernomyrdin on the last day of the Moscow visit had diplomatic priority for the German politician. A meeting between Fadeyev and representatives of DWA didn't take place, either.

Nevertheless, Diepgen and Chernomyrdin discussed the concept of "combined infrastructure corridors" that would bundle rail, highway, electricity, and telecommunications connections between Berlin and Moscow. Diepgen assured the Russians that the German government was firmly committed to place, at the Essen summit, the Berlin-Moscow rail link on the list of EU Commission projects with priority funding. This would imply that it would be realized by the years 2010-15.

Diepgen also urged Mayor Luzhkov to consider the German Transrapid maglev train system for the envisioned rail link between Moscow-Central and Sheremetyevo International Airport. If Russia bought that system, it would be a breakthrough for Germany's maglev technology on the world market.

Finally, DWA and TVER, the biggest Russian producer of rolling stock, signed an agreement that envisions the annual production—by joint venture or Russian purchase of German license—of up to 2,500 rail cars for the Russian State Railways. Throughout the postwar period, DWA, with its six plants in eastern Germany, was the number one supplier of special rail cars to the U.S.S.R. It is the only producer with the know-how to produce the cars Russia needs for the Trans-Siberian Railway, which can survive the bitter cold of the Siberian winter.